

Evaluation: providing better weed awareness outcomes for NSW

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Summary Evaluation of existing programs is essential in order to continue delivering good communication outcomes and consequently good weed management outcomes. But, it is often difficult to admit a program is 'tired', has lost effectiveness and there is need for change.

In the early 1990s, the NSW Department of Agriculture (NSW DPI) in partnership with NSW weed professionals initiated a State-wide Weed Awareness Program which evolved into the Weedbusters program.

For many years these programs achieved significant results and impact in NSW, gaining high profile media coverage and community participation through regional and State Weedbusters events.

However, community participation in the NSW Weedbusters program steadily diminished over time. Key stakeholders were no longer engaged in delivering weed awareness activities in their regions and recognition of the Weedbusters brand was low.

At the request of key stakeholders, the NSW DPI conducted an evaluation of the program in February 2007. During this process feedback and input was sought from local government, Catchment Management Authorities, past NSW Weedbusters Coordinators and NSW DPI staff.

The evaluation objectively reviewed the past weed awareness efforts in NSW, identified the positives, identified the current constraints of the Weedbusters program and most importantly, defined the expectations of weed professionals for any future weed awareness programs.

The group surveyed indicated that:

- Weed activities would be done regardless of Weedbusters Week

- There should be a State-wide focus for Weedbusters Week driven by NSW DPI
- Weedbusters is not well recognised as a brand in the general community of NSW
- There should be an overarching State-wide media campaign to support regional activities
- The Weedbusters Week lacked flexibility and did not always fit into their activity schedule
- Woody is not an effective mascot for the NSW program
- A weed awareness program is required that is easy to participate in and provides participating organisations suggestions of potential activities and the supporting resources to implement the activities.

The evaluation has resulted in the development of the NSW Weed Awareness Plan 2007–2011 (McCaffery and Schembri 2007). This plan sets the direction of a future NSW Weed Awareness Strategy, including key actions and timeframes, to meet the needs of NSW weed professionals by providing them with innovative, well resourced awareness activities to deliver regionally.

Keywords Weedbusters, weed awareness, evaluation, strategy.

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REFERENCES

McCaffery, A. and Schembri, A. (2007). NSW weed awareness plan. Orange Agricultural Institute, Orange.